



NEWS RELEASE – 17 May 2010

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Hasn't the PNM *already* committed the nation to gay rights, advocates ask?
Leading GLBT group reminds electorate and parties that current Government has already signed T&T onto international commitments to gay rights – twice

Responding to the suggestion by United National Congress/People's Partnership political leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar in a May 16th television interview that her Government would put the matter of “gay rights” to a national referendum and “let the people decide”, Trinidad & Tobago's leading advocacy voice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) citizens is calling on the People's National Movement (PNM) to clarify for voters the nation's and that party's existing commitments to full human rights and equality for GLBT people.

The Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO) is asking Prime Minister Patrick Manning, Foreign Affairs Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon and Gender Minister Marlene McDonald (all candidates for re-election in the May 24th general election) why they have not disclosed to the nation the PNM Government's recent support of consecutive resolutions in hemispheric fora that clearly commit the nation to protecting the human rights of GLBT people. CAISO is upset that these pledges have remained invisible in the party's manifesto, on its campaign platforms, and in recent television interviews by McDonald on gender policy.

Trinidad & Tobago joined with other members of the Organisation of American States on June 4, 2009 (AG/RES. 2504) and June 3, 2008 (AG/RES. 2435) in passing resolutions before the group's General Assembly committing to protect people from human rights violations and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The full text of the resolutions is at: www.oas.org/DIL/AG-RES_2504-2009_eng.doc and www.oas.org/dil/AGRES_2435.doc.

CAISO spokesperson Sharon Mottley said the group is non-partisan but its PNM members especially have been deeply disappointed by statements in the media by Minister McDonald waffling on the question of protecting GLBT citizens from discrimination. “Why are they ashamed or afraid to say we are their children, they love us and take care of *us* too?” she asked, echoing the party's election slogan, and noting that many members of the group believe children of more than one PNM member of the last Parliament are gay or lesbian.

Communications Coordinator Colin Robinson added: “Our nation, thanks to the sitting Government, is now formally on record in support of protecting GLBT people. That should be a point of pride, and the starting point for election campaign debate among the parties about how they will work to fulfil that pledge. It would be shameful if any party in this election, where every vote matters, were to renege on that national commitment to a community of thousands of GLBT voters. We're looking for clear signs that that is not the case.”

“We're offering ourselves to *all* the parties, both before and after the election,” the NGO's Mobilisation Coordinator Kareem Griffith noted, “to help them understand how we can build a better T&T for GLBT people. National issues affect our community, often in particular ways – whether it's receiving health care with dignity, being targets of crime and gender-based violence, getting justice, safety at school, the opportunity to access housing and education, or being free to express our opinion.”

The group's election platform is at: <http://wp.me/pzQlW-wF>.